



State of Wyoming Military Department Office of the Adjutant General

*5500 Bishop Boulevard
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82009-3320
<http://www.wy.ngb.army.mil>*

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Media contact:

Deidre Forster (307) 772-5253; cell (307) 631-4153; email deidre.forster@wy.ngb.army.mil.
Master Sgt. Trudy Woodcock, (307) 772-5229; email trudy.woodcock@wy.ngb.army.mil.
Spc. Christian Venhuizen, (307) 772-5040; email Christian.venhuizen@wy.ngb.army.mil.

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PDHRA assists Wyo. Army Guard Soldiers after deployment

By Spc. Jennifer Sardam, 111th Press Camp, Wyoming Army National Guard

CHEYENNE – As the Global War on Terror continues to require the overseas deployment of thousands of U.S. Army National Guardsmen, citizen Soldiers and their families remain faced with a number of common challenges.

The return home can be an emotionally difficult adjustment, just as the departure to a war zone may be. Family problems and the lingering symptoms of post traumatic stress can hamper the progress of veterans seeking to get back to a normal way of life in their communities.

In the hopes of providing further support to re-deploying Soldiers, the Department of Defense and the National Guard Bureau are lending a hand with a recently implemented health protection program known as the Post Deployment Health Reassessment.

"It's one more opportunity for them to get assistance," said Col. Tim Sheppard, Wyoming Army National Guard chief of staff. "If it helps one Soldier, it was worth it. If it helps one family, it was worth it. That's the bottom line to me."

This national program was put into use for the first time in Wyoming last April, with more than 100 Soldiers from the 133rd Combat Support Engineers, a Wyoming Army National Guard unit from Laramie, Wyo., attending the first iteration of the PDHRA following their deployment to Iraq.

The most recent PDHRA event was held in Cheyenne last weekend.

Sheppard said he hopes the program will encourage Soldiers to take advantage of the assistance they are offered, to "let their guard down and let somebody help them."

The reassessment provides education, screenings and access to care for a wide variety of health and readjustment questions and concerns that may not emerge until Soldiers have been home for three-to six-months. This is the time frame when many deployment-related problems become evident.

"You don't realize something's different until you've been home for a while," said Patrick M. Shanahan, a behavioral health specialist with one of the Guard Bureau's PDHRA teams. "This is a big piece that we're doing to help these Soldiers."

The screening and education process covers everything from post traumatic stress and family problems to finance and educational benefits.

During the PDHRA, Soldiers have the opportunity to discuss any health concerns or questions with a health-care provider in a private face-to-face session. If they require further evaluation or treatment, a follow-up appointment can be scheduled with an appropriate health-care or community service provider.

The event included teams of doctors, nurses and counselors but also representatives from veterans' organizations from around the state.

"We want to let them know what they are going through is not abnormal," said Jay Phelan, a counselor from the Cheyenne Veterans Assistance Center. "We're here to help. Hopefully a Soldier who needs this help will take advantage of our services." He added counseling services are available to both Soldiers and their family members.

The PDHRA program is now a standard to be followed by all re-deploying U.S. units.

"It (the PDHRA) is an important step the Army took to show that it's taking care of Soldiers," said Maj. James E. Schmidt, commander Detachment 1, 111th Press Camp, in Laramie.

More information about the PDHRA can be found on the internet at <http://www.pdhealth.mil> or <http://www.deploymentlink.osd.mil>.

Soldiers and their families can also call the Deployment Health Help Line at (800) 497-6261.

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Photo available upon request.

Possible cutline information: Patrick Shanahan, a behavioral health specialist with one of the National Guard Bureau's Post Deployment Health Reassessment teams, assists Maj. Stacy Roth, commander 1022nd Medical Company, Wyoming Army National Guard, in filling out questionnaires to determine Roth's post-deployment needs. This national program was put into use for the first time in Wyoming last April, with more than 100 Soldiers from the 133rd Combat Support Engineers, a Wyoming Army National Guard unit from Laramie, Wyo., attending the first iteration of the PDHRA following their deployment to Iraq. (Photo by Spc. Jennifer Sardam, Det. 1, 111th Press Camp, Wyoming Army National Guard)